

# UP FRONT



## ARCHITECTURE AROUND US

By Lu Donnelly

### “Missing” Cousins

Architectural tour guides are counseled not to dwell on buildings that have been demolished, as people are annoyed by looking for something and seeing nothing. But Pittsburghers are notorious for giving directions using long-gone buildings, such as “turn at the old Jenkin’s Arcade.” In that tradition I’m going to illustrate two buildings that I wish I had seen in person, but have only seen in photographs. Each was a fitting companion to its neighboring building, complementary rather than identical, “cousins” not twins.

The first pair is the East End Savings and Trust Company built c. 1911 in East Liberty at the corner of South Highland and Penn Avenues, and its “cousin,” the Highland Building (1909-1910). The latter survives at 121 South Highland Avenue as apartments.<sup>1</sup> The Highland Building is one of 11 documented commissions in Pittsburgh by the D.H. Burnham & Company architectural firm.<sup>2</sup> Daniel Hudson Burnham (1846-1912) is best known as the coordinating architect for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago and for organizing his architectural practice as a corporation. Henry Clay Frick was attracted to this firm for both reasons and he commissioned several buildings, including the Highland, which housed offices and retail establishments in its 13 terra cotta-clad stories. The missing cousin building was designed by Frederick J. Osterling sometime after the Highland Building’s 1910 completion.

The East End Savings and Trust Company building matched Burnham’s building in height although it was a bit shallower. The two buildings together lent East Liberty the aspect of a thriving downtown commercial center. The East End Savings and Trust Building was demolished sometime after 1965 for a modern one-story Pittsburgh National Bank.

The second missing cousin is the Bessemer Building (1904-1905), adjacent to the former Fulton Building (1905-1906), now the Renaissance Hotel. Both buildings were commissioned by Henry Phipps and designed by Grosvenor Atterbury (1869-1956) of New York. The pair created a gracious entry portal to downtown Pittsburgh from the Roberto

Clemente Bridge (formerly the Sixth Street Bridge). Between 1904 and 1908, Atterbury designed four buildings in this location for the Phipps family.<sup>3</sup> Only the Fulton Building remains, but its companions were equally fascinating. The demolished Bessemer Building matched the Fulton Building in height (13 stories) and massing, but was a solid mass instead of having a seven-story open arch at its core as did the Fulton Building. Its corner bays had Chicago style windows, and were delineated by stone quoins topped with deeply projecting eaves.<sup>4</sup> The central portion of the building contained three slightly recessed bays lit by double sash windows. The corner pavilions were echoed on the Fulton Building.



**Sales office, East Liberty Chamber of Commerce, Pittsburgh.**

*From Stringtown on the Pike by John Fulton Stuart Collins, 1966.*

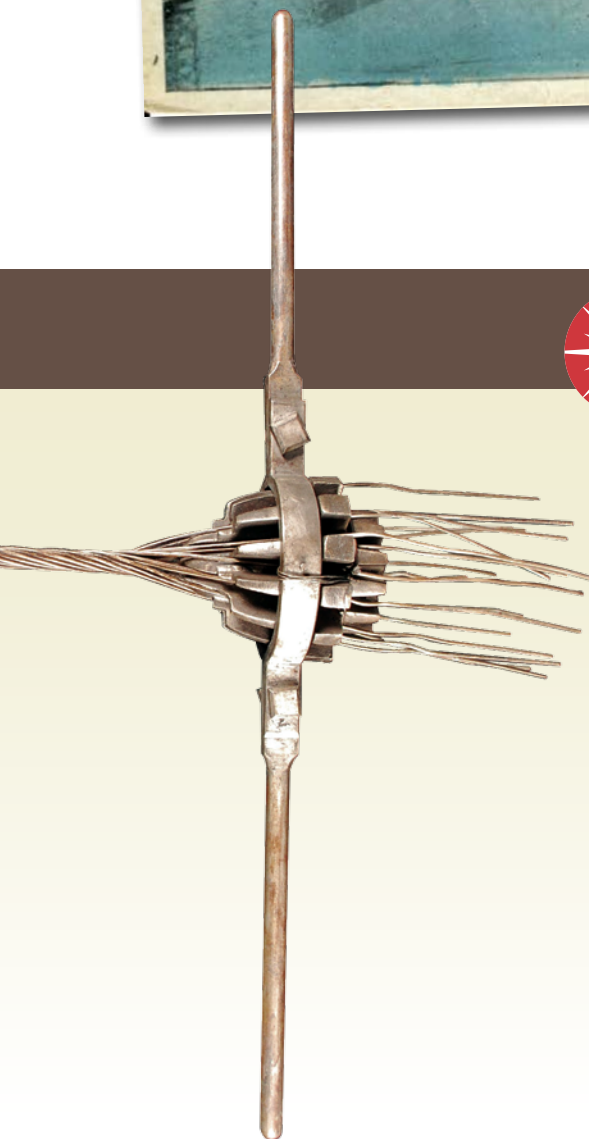


A postcard of "Federal St. Bridge, looking East" shows, from left, Fulton Building, Bessemer Building, and the Manufacturer's Building (1906-1907), all designed by Grosvenor Atterbury.

Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation.



Smithsonian Connection



## Patent model for patent #6082, to improve top for making wire ropes, by John Roebling, 1849

On April 10, 1845, a massive fire destroyed much of Pittsburgh along the Monongahela River. The covered wooden Monongahela Bridge—the city's first and oldest span—burned in less than 10 minutes. John Roebling proposed a wire rope cable suspension bridge to replace it. He had perfected his rope while working for the Pennsylvania Canal and used it for a canal aqueduct he built across the Allegheny River. His wire rope was untested on heavy, load-bearing bridges, but his design successfully proved its strength. The bridge established Roebling's reputation and launched a career that became legendary for the design and building of the Brooklyn Bridge. This patent demonstrates that Roebling continued to improve on his process for producing the cable after its successful application in Pittsburgh.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center.  
Photo by Paula Andras.

# UP FRONT

Each was named for a famous inventor whose contributions to Pittsburgh were vital: Sir Henry Bessemer, inventor of a revolutionary steel-making process, and Robert Fulton, steamboat designer whose boats brought prosperity to Pittsburgh's rivers.

Since we rarely have the luxury of bringing mothballed buildings back to life, it is amazing that both the Fulton and Highland Buildings have found successful new uses after years of disuse, but wouldn't it have been delightful if their "cousins" had survived as well? ☀

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<sup>1</sup> With the Wallace Building on the corner of South Highland and Centre Avenues, the two buildings will be called Walnut on Highland and contain 110 one and two bedroom apartments and commercial spaces on the ground floor. TKA, Tasso Katselas Associates, Inc., is the architectural firm of record for the rejuvenation.

<sup>2</sup> Al Tannler carefully documented this number in the *PHLF News*, April 2009. Although the number of commissions published over the years has ranged from 16 to 20, there were duplicates included due to address and building name changes. Burnham's firm also designed a monument in Homewood Cemetery (1900-1903) for the two Frick children who pre-deceased their father, Martha (age 6) and Henry Clay Frick, Jr. (less than one month).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Phipps consolidated his Pittsburgh real estate holdings as the Phipps Pennsylvania Land Trust and left them in the hands of his three sons. For more on these buildings, see: *The Architecture of Grosvenor Atterbury* by Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 119-124. The Renaissance Hotel was repurposed by J.G. Johnson Architects with Celli Flynn Brennan Architects as project managers.

<sup>4</sup> Normally Chicago style windows consist of one fixed sash central window flanked by two narrower double sash windows. The Bessemer building had three double sash windows in a shallow bay configuration to increase air circulation and light to the offices within.

Highland Building with the former Pittsburgh National Bank in place of the East End Savings and Trust Company building.

Photo by Lu Donnelly.



Fulton Building (left) and parking lot in place of the Bessemer Building (right).

Photo by Lu Donnelly.

